

Is Office, No. 26 North High Street, Columbus, Ohio.

# FOUR LETTERS

TO

## HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE.

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- No. 2. CONDITIONS OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION,  
AND, HEREIN, OF EQUAL SUFFRAGE AT THE  
SOUTH.
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TO EQUAL SUFFRAGE.
- No. 4. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE REBEL DEBT, OR OF  
THE LOSSES OF REBELS BY THE WAR, SHOULD  
BE GUARDED AGAINST BY CONSTITUTIONAL  
PROVISION.

By O. H. WALDO,

MILWAUKEE, WIS.

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## FOUR LETTERS

TO

# HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE.

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### No. 1. EQUAL SUFFRAGE IN WISCONSIN.

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 10, 1865.

HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE:

*Dear Sir:*—While all good men rejoice in the light of peace that once more breaks over the land, still no thoughtful man can yet regard all danger as past. The contest at arms, with its battles and slaughter, we may well hope is over; but I do not need to remind you that there are other contests, less bloody indeed, but not less vital to the republic, which remain. The struggles for independence in the war of the American revolution, were not more essential to securing the freedom and happiness which we enjoy, than were the peaceful labors of the patriots and statesmen who framed the Federal constitution—that great charter of American liberty—and settled the terms and conditions of lasting independence and peace. Nor can we now tell whether we are more indebted to the valor of the heroes who, with their blood, purchased the right of soil on which to rear the fabric of American constitutional freedom, or to the constancy, prudence, and wisdom of those sages and statesmen who so deeply and so wisely laid those peaceful foundations and builded thereon. So, at this day, grand and fearful as the trial by battle has been, it is not yet certain that equal or greater achievements do not await those

who shall settle again the foundations of peace, and restore again to the whole country the ancient constitutional order, on such terms as shall be consistent with the national safety. I need hardly remind you that it is chiefly to those who are in authority—to you and your associates who have part in the national councils—to whom we naturally turn for guidance at such a time. The national fabric has been fearfully shaken, but—thank God—not demolished, by the convulsions of the last four years. To you we naturally look to restore and rebuild it. At such a time, therefore, the deepest interest attaches to every opinion and word of one in your official position.

While such solicitude fills all our minds, I am persuaded that you will listen, if not with interest, at least with patience, to the suggestions of the humblest citizen.

I listened with interest to your address at the Academy of Music in this city on the 2d inst.,—but I cannot bring my mind to agree to all your conclusions.

First, you insist that it was a *wise* and *courageous* act of duty, on the part of the late Union State Convention, to refuse to make any declaration in favor of the proposed amendment extending the right of suffrage to colored citizens of this State.

With great respect, I see nothing either wise or courageous about it. I do not question the sincerity or patriotism of yourself or of any delegate who acted with you in that convention, but I wish to consider, and to ask you to reconsider, the reasons of that action. You give two reasons.

First, you say it was not proper to declare anything upon this subject, because the legislature has submitted it to the people as a *popular* and not a political question. I have tried to consider that reason. The phrase sounds very well to the ear, but I have been unable to discover its meaning—or that it has any meaning. It seems to me to be a sounding sentence without *any* definite or important meaning in the connection in which you employ it. I suppose a question is *political* whenever it relates to the necessity, expediency or wisdom of political action. This matter of the restriction or extension of suffrage pertains closely and entirely to the governmental *policy* of the state. It is one of the most essential and fundamental political questions—whatever way it is viewed—which can possibly be raised. It is *entirely political*. It lies at the foundation of the political structure of the state. At the same time it is also popular, because it is by law to be decided directly by the people—as many political questions are in this country. The question, then, is certainly both political and popular—but no less political because it is popular. What, then, becomes of the force of your reason—that this question has become popular and *therefore* not political? When should a political question be considered in a political convention, if not when it is about to be voted on and decided by the people? Or do you esteem it *safer or more expedient* to confine your action to questions which are not about to be so directly decided by the

people? If so, then where is the *courage*, of which you speak, of such negative action?

Seriously, my dear sir, is it not just when such a political question is referred to the people and is about to be decided by the people directly, that it becomes both suitable and necessary to mould and concentrate popular opinions by discussions, by addresses, by resolutions and by appliances suitable to influence the popular mind?

Your second reason is, that there are some persons in the Union party who do not favor the proposed extension of suffrage—and a declaration for it by the convention would be unjust to that minority. I do not so understand party necessity or party policy. You agree that the amendment is just and wise, and ought to be adopted. You intend to vote for it yourself. You express strong hope that it will prevail. But how is this act of justice likely to ever be done by a popular vote, when all the leaders and platform makers of one of the great parties are openly hostile to it, if those of the other express their fear to declare for it?

I agree with you that a great national party in power, with all the responsibilities of administration upon it, at a period of public danger, cannot innocently barter away success for the privilege of asserting things which are trifling or non-essential. But, sir, you well know that no great party is or can be composed of men whose opinions, *in all particulars*, agree. Such a national party is not practicable. A wise and practical man gives his adhesion to that party which he thinks, upon the whole, most likely, in the main, to accomplish the things which he deems best for the country; and, as to the points, if any, respecting which he differs from the majority, labors to mould opinion within his party to his own.

The Union party is a great ruling party, with the destinies of the nation, for the time, in its hands. It consists mainly of true and earnest men who seek the same great ends—a permanent peace, a united nation, and a free people under a free constitution—though they have often differed and constantly differ in some respects, as independent, thinking men must and will. It would have been a folly and crime unspeakable, for them to have divided and thrown away their power to carry the nation through the late great struggle, because they did not all agree at all times as to the wisdom of President Lincoln's policy in some respects. It would, in my opinion, be equally a folly and a crime now to break away, destroy the power of the party, and leave the country in the hands of those who have sympathized with its enemies throughout its mighty struggle for life, because the delegates in convention did not declare for the amendment, as I thought they should. I presume none will so break away. Nor, on the other hand, do I suppose that you, or any other honest Union man, or certainly no considerable number of such men, who would otherwise vote the Union ticket this fall, would have so broken away and refused to vote that ticket, and so placed the power of the country in the hands of its enemies, if the convention had declared for impartial suffrage in this State. If so, then your second reason fails, and the refusal to declare the sentiments of the majority on so vital a question, was a grave error.

Again, you speak of shooting deserters. Sir, if party discipline forbids a free and bold discussion, then that shooting might as well begin. I have no fear of danger to our party from free and candid discussion of practical questions. It is only thus that the best conclusions are reached. Nor am I of those who seem fearful lest

we should fall behind the false democracy of the day, in the strife or game of praising the President. I have no fear of President Johnson being Tylerized. I remember too well how he stood at the outbreak and all through the great struggle; how he stood in his own state almost alone—stiff and sturdy, faithful among the faithless—with treason and traitors all around him. I have no fear that he is the material of which traitors or Tylers are made. These democrats have had their time of praising other good men, but it was short. In 1862 they were praising Mr. Lincoln and declaring that he was a good conservative whig; that they were better friends to him than those mad radicals who elected him; that if he was to be elected again they would have to do it; and they, that year, in this district, elected a member of their own to Congress on the assertion that he would give better support to Mr. Lincoln to his radical opponent. The same nation can never, in the same generation, or within the memory of men, produce two such fools as John Tyler was. Mr. Lincoln never fell into the snare of these men—and Mr. Johnson never will. But I cannot suppose you differ from me in this. I cannot doubt you deem it, as I do, the highest privilege and the highest duty of freemen in a republic, as well as the most friendly duty of freemen to their rulers, at all times to publicly, candidly and fully investigate and discuss, and to form and concentrate opinion upon the living questions of present practical consequence relating to the common wealth or to the common safety. I repeat—I deem this especially the duty of those who are the sincere friends of the party in power, and who could add strength and wisdom to the administration. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," now as always.

It is only thus—by free and earnest dis-

cussion—that that public opinion is formed, matured and directed, which constitutes the chief power and safety of a republic—that sincere and earnest public opinion which so stiffened, strengthened and aided the pure mind of the martyr President in his day, and added, as by a Divine power, that vigor and enlightenment to his administration, which bore it up and on-

ward, in the darkest hour, against all difficulties, over all obstacles, amidst all embarrassments, to ultimate and complete victory.

I will say something of equal suffrage at the South in my next letter.

Yours very truly,

O. H. WALDO.

## NO. 2.....CONDITIONS OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION, AND, HEREIN, OF EQUAL SUFFRAGE AT THE SOUTH.

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 10, 1865.

HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE:

DEAR SIR:—Respect for your opinions might well cause me to hesitate in the expression of my own; but I cannot yet bring myself to agree to what seems to me to be the unseemly haste which you manifest to bring back rebel states to participate in the national councils and to share in the national authority; nor can I agree to your views upon equal suffrage at the South. Do not misunderstand me. I know the evils of continued military rule. I know the danger that the sense of obligation of the constitution and the laws will become weakened by disuse. I am not only willing but desirous to treat those erring people who return to right paths with justice, with a generous and hearty liberality. I am not only ready but desirous to see each and all the states lately in rebellion restored to all their just and ancient privileges under the constitution, as speedily as it can be done consistently with the national safety. But I cannot forget that we have but just now escaped from an imminent and fearful peril; that we have the men and the com-

munities which deliberately brought this peril upon us, before us, conquered, disarmed and in our power, and while I would be magnanimous in the hour of victory, yet I cannot forget that these men and communities have forfeited their ancient privileges by their crimes; that they cannot resume those privileges without the nation's consent nor otherwise than upon such conditions as the national government shall fix. And in view of the fearful cost of the struggle for the nation's life, of the precedents of history, and of all the considerations that pertain to the memory of the brave men who have fought and fallen, and to the security of the country which happily survives, I dare not omit to insist upon such conditions and safeguards which can aid to preserve the fruits of this victory forever.

That the Federal government has a right to impose such conditions is now virtually conceded by all. I will not waste time in an idle discussion as to whether the states lately in open rebellion are out of or in the Union; though I have not the smallest doubt that the government has a perfect right, in all cases where it has an interest to do so, to treat

them as out of the Union. In other words, while they certainly had no right to go out, and *they* cannot be now heard to assert that they are or have been out of the Union, still that affords no reason why the *government* may not insist that they have, by treason and open war against it, forfeited their privileges in the Union. Compare great things to small. No lessee or tenant can, by violating his lease, by committing waste, or committing any act of forfeiture, gain a right, *on his part*, to declare the lease void, or the relation of landlord and tenant dissolved. But that affords no reason why the *landlord* may not assert the forfeiture against the forfeiting tenant. No individual can declare himself outside the constitution and laws, and free from their force, but he may very easily commit a crime by which he will forfeit and lose all protection of the constitution or laws to his property, his liberty, or even to his life, except so far as the clemency of the sovereign may preserve them to him. So these rebel communities, which have broken all their constitutional obligations, and made war on the government, had no constitutional right or power to commit those crimes involved in secession; yet, in the nature of the case, they must be held to have lost the right to the enjoyment of any constitutional privileges, except on such terms and conditions as the government shall fix. The government constantly, and of necessity, acts upon this theory—that is to say, it absolutely requires and insists upon *certain* conditions precedent to the resumption, by communities lately in rebellion, of all their ancient power, and privileges as states. And the manifest necessity of this course compels all parties to approve the action of the President so far. The great principle is, then, entirely settled and virtually agreed upon by all, that

these communities have, by treason, rebellion, and open war upon the government, forfeited their right to do, as states, all that they would otherwise have an unconditional right to do—*forfeited*, indeed, their right to do *anything*, as states, except upon some conditions or other. It is manifest therefore, that if these communities are not in *every* sense out of the Union, they are certainly out of the independent position in the Union which they before occupied—since they cannot now do the things they could before do without conditions and consent. All that remains, therefore, is to inquire what these conditions should be.

Those people have just been in open war against the Government. They have made a gigantic and desperate struggle to break up the government and to destroy the constitution which was their shield. They have ceased from fighting, not because of any change of temper but from a sheer lack of strength to keep up the contest. We cannot forget that that contest has cost us thousands of millions of treasure and an infinite sacrifice of blood and precious life—as precious blood and life as were ever poured out on the altar of freedom in any country. Surely the conditions upon which these men should be permitted to return, and to resume their former share in the control of the country, should be such as shall afford the best practicable guarantee that this sacrifice shall not have been in vain.

I do not hesitate to say that I would never consent to their return to full political power as states in the Union until I was satisfied by some proof—I do not now say, nor can I say what all the proofs might be—but there should be proof of some kind that convinced my understanding, that a substantial ruling majority of the people who are to exercise political authority there, were ready and

determined to support and maintain the Federal Union and Constitution in good faith. I would not organize a civil state government and restore full civil power because there were five loyal men there who deserve the protection of the constitution. Five men do not make a state. Five men cannot rule and maintain a state; and to go through the form of organizing a state to indulge a theory that even five faithful men deserve all the rights of citizens of a state with a republican form, when you will have to hold it up and govern it after all by military power, is a mere farce and worse than a farce. I would be glad to see a speedy reconstruction, but I would wait one year, or five years, or fifty years, before I would restore to political power the enemies of the country, just now at open war against the country, and who, I believed, had ceased fighting only from exhaustion, and were seeking re-admission to the national councils simply from a hope of reaching, through fraud and crime, what they had been unable to accomplish by force. I do not allege that all the Southern people cherish that temper. I do not think they do. I hope a clear majority do not. But you cannot tell in a day what the real prevailing disposition is. We must wait a little. These returning rebels can well afford to wait a little, however good their intentions may be. It is of mere clemency that they are allowed to live and enjoy any rights. I repeat, we must wait a little. *Time* is a great healer. *Time* is a great restorer. *Time* is a great enlightener. *Time* is needed to permit the clouds and dust to blow away from the bloody field, and to enable us to see what dispositions prevail. It is impossible to foresee precisely what proofs of good faith will appear after a little while, and therefore we cannot foretell precisely what we will require. But in every event I

would take *time* till I had some satisfactory proof that those states would in good faith sustain the government, before I restored them to political power in the government.

Moreover, for the present I can see no proof of good faith in accepting the situation and supporting our Union, so good as would be afforded by a cheerful yielding of equal civil and political rights to all true Union men, without regard to birth-place or color. If I could not find other sufficient evidence of good faith, (and I do not yet see any other) I would certainly require that. It is already required, that they acquiesce in the abolition of slavery. What could possibly afford such confidence in their sincerity in yielding freedom to the blacks, as the conferring upon them of all those civil and political powers and rights which belong to freemen—including the right to protect themselves on the witness stand and at the polls?

Beside, there are other infinitely weighty reasons why this distinction in civil and political rights, founded on mere color, should be abolished.

1st. *It is right* that it should be abolished. If anything is cardinal in political doctrine in this country, it is certainly this—that governments derive all their just powers from the governed. We repudiate, as our fathers did, the assumption of any one privileged class in a country, to make a government and laws for the others. We have learned from childhood, that all those who aid, by payment of taxes in the support, and by bearing arms in the defence of the government, should be represented in the control of that government. We must not lightly ignore these fundamental principles.

2d. *It is due to the colored man* who has been, without exception, so nobly, so constantly true to our country's cause—



who came to our aid at the hour of our extremest need, and by his valor and faithfulness turned apparent defeat into victory; who, having, to human sight, sufficient weight to turn the scale, did at the critical moment turn it in our favor—that he shall be permitted, in a country thus saved by him, and boasting of equal laws, to peacefully assert his civil and political rights, in the courts and elections of that country, even in the presence of his enemy and oppressor.

3d. It would be palpably unjust for a government just saved from destruction at the hands of traitors, to voluntarily put its saviours and defenders, against their will, in the power of its enemies and their enemies. I will answer your objections to equal suffrage in my next.

Yours truly,

O. H. WALDO

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### NO. 3. ANSWER TO SENATOR DOOLITTLE'S OBJECTIONS TO EQUAL SUFFRAGE.

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 10th, '65.

HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE:

DEAR SIR:—But, what are your objections to giving this right to the colored man? You say the whites in those states—the late masters,—“will not tolerate this measure”—that they will make open war upon the blacks, a “*War of extermination.*” Not *tolerate!* Will *make war!* I had thought we were done with that sort of language. Who are these men who will not *tolerate*? I thought they had tried making war—and were conquered, disarmed and in the power of the government. I thought they were in a position to crave pardon and mercy and not dictate conditions. My dear sir, these men are conquered traitors and rebels, and must submit to such terms as shall be proposed. If this requirement is not just and necessary, that is another thing.—It is never wise to require what is not just and right. But, permit me to remind you again that these men are conquered and must submit to whatever is just and

right and necessary, and the *government is the sole judge of what is so.*

Moreover, I have not the least fear that they will not submit readily and peacefully to whatever we distinctly and firmly require. It will not change my opinion to remind me that the prejudices of those high-spirited people are strong. I repeat again, they are conquered and must and will submit to whatever we require as necessary. What act or thing do you suppose they were or could be more averse to, than to giving up four million slaves—and giving them up, too, under the humiliation of compulsion? And yet they submit to this with alacrity, as a condition of peace and restoration. Why? Why because it is unequivocally insisted on as an indispensable condition. And they will in like manner submit to any other thing which we in the same way insist on as necessary to our safety or our honor. If the condition is not right or necessary, then it ought not to be required. But if we do require it as right and necessary,

I wish to impress upon you that they are not in a position to talk, as of old, of what *they will tolerate*.

Again, you say the colored men are not intelligent enough to vote. I reply:

1st. Then make some degree of intelligence the sole condition. If you do so, and say that a man ought to possess that degree, I *may* not differ with you. At all events, the question then will be different from the present. We are now inquiring whether a man shall be excluded simply because of his color. When the intelligence test comes up we will consider that.

2d. Intelligence is not the only qualification of a good voter. It is no more essential that a man should be intelligent enough to be able to vote wisely, than that he be honest and sincere enough to desire to vote rightly. Intelligence and patriotism are both very necessary, and of the two the latter is more indispensable than the former; since an ignorant man who tries to go right will frequently succeed in that—while an intelligent man who tries to go wrong will nearly always succeed in *that*. You are also aware that great numbers of those traitorous white men whom you are in a hurry to have vote are very ignorant; and I would like to know whether it is your deliberate opinion that the whole body of southern white men, including the stupid piney-woods men, the poor white trash, the great majority filled with bitterness towards the government and the Union, will constitute (if you consider both qualifications, intelligence and patriotism,) a safer body of voters for the country, than the sincere, earnest, loyal blacks—though they may be unlearned? Which class do you really believe will most often vote for representatives in Congress who will labor sincerely and earnestly to render the government and the Union perpetual?

3d. In insisting so much upon a high

degree of intelligence as a condition of voting, have you not overlooked some conclusions which you have heretofore reached on the subject of popular suffrage?—You and I both hold the true democratic theory about that. Ignorance among men is the source of infinite difficulties under all governments; but *we* repudiate the old assumption of the higher or educated classes, on that account, to form governments and laws for the lower and uneducated, without their consent. It is my opinion and I presume it is yours, that, upon the whole, it is the wisest and safest plan to permit all men of ordinary intelligence who are not criminals, who become permanent residents in the country and elect to become citizens, to have a voice in the choice of its rulers. Ignorant men form a dangerous element always and everywhere; but we believe they are less dangerous when allowed that voice, than when deprived of their natural right. Besides, the great object of government is the good of the governed—not of the governing class, but of the whole body of the governed. These colored men are to be free. That decree has gone out. How shall they be best fitted for the enjoyment of all the rights of freemen? The wisdom of that careful lady who declared that her boy should not go into the water till he should have learned to swim, has not been generally approved. And yet it seems to me not unlike your rule that these men shall never vote till they shall be familiar with the duties of voters. The reason why the Americans, as a body, are better able to exercise the franchise wisely than others, is not altogether because they are better instructed in schools, for there are several other nations which excel ours in that respect; but it is, manifestly, because not all of education comes of schools or of books—because, while not very learned in a technical sense, they have gained that

education, that discipline, that self respect, self possession, self control and that practical insight and knowledge of affairs which so distinguish them, by constant practice and assumption of responsibility from childhood, by constant participation in all the duties of freemen in town meetings, in school meetings, in church meetings, in mass meetings, in caucuses, on juries, at elections, in councils, as supervisors, as select men, as legislators—in every place and in every capacity, where freemen use their discretion and exercise their power.—This is the great republican idea. This is the great source of our superiority, the great cause of our growth.

Here are four millions of newly made freemen. There must and will be some inconveniences attending this great change. But I urge upon you that this great multitude will be sure to be more content, more peaceful and more useful if they are allowed the exercise of all the rights of freemen—and so, are made more ambitious and more cheerful in the support of the government, because they have a share in it and are hopeful of exercising an influence to remove the evils they experience. I pray you, sir, to consider whether there is not a fallacy in this threatening pretext that the black men will be in greater danger of oppression, and even of extermination, if they are admitted to full civil and political rights. Will not the black man have greater incentive to bide his time wisely, and to rise by merit—and will not the white man have greater incentive to treat him kindly and permit him to rise, if he (the black man) has a voice and a power in the conduct of affairs, than if he have none?

I do not believe at all in the idea, which seems to haunt and oppress you, that the blacks will be in greater danger of oppression, abuse, and a war of exter-

mination, with the right of suffrage than without it. They must, in any event, be surrounded, more or less, by perils and difficulties from the selfishness and low passions of men around them. But if the government is able to protect them in freedom without the ballot, either by military power or by laws enacted by Congress under the amendment to the constitution administered by the Federal courts, why can it not as well protect them in the same way *with* the ballot? Why will the labor of the government in giving protection be greater, because the colored men are allowed to do what they can to protect themselves? All this talk about the danger of exasperation on the part of the late masters, if the ballot is given to all freemen alike, is, in my opinion, idle and unworthy a moment's attention. It is but a repetition of the same threats that were made, first to prevent emancipation and then to prevent arming the colored men. A firm hand prevented the execution of those threats before, and will do so now. Moreover, there is a mighty though a silent power in this right to an equal voice in the choice of rulers. I tell you, one million men possessing that right, will hold such a balance of power in those states that, although they be unlearned, they will make themselves heard and more or less regarded by ambitious men, who need and will seek their support.

Fourth. Once more, is it not possible in our vanity of race, we are liable to underestimate the practical intelligence and discipline of the colored people? True, they have been enslaved for generations and kept in ignorance of books and schools, but, I repeat, not all of education comes of books and schools. The great end of education is discipline and strength.—Two years ago it was as confidently asserted that they were cowards and poltroons, as it is now that they are dolts

and fools; and yet with what alacrity did they take up arms in our cause, when, to human sight, it was almost waning, and with what heroism did they pour out their blood in that cause at Milliken's Bend, Fort Wagner, and on whatever other field they were brought under arms face to face with their lordly oppressors. Their character for manly courage now stands vindicated before the world.

They may not understand the intricacies of the argument upon the tariff system, or the currency, or the finances,—and what proportion of the whole number of white voters in any state do so? But, however unlearned they may be in the refinements of legislation, finance and diplomacy, experience has shown that the common people, where they have the right and the responsibility of voting, get a very clear understanding of the general drift of parties and of party policies, and of the character of public men. They very generally learn who are their friends and their country's friends—their enemies and their country's enemies; and I submit to you that the colored men of the South have, under the circumstances, shown a remarkable clearness of insight upon the same subjects.

And when we remember with what discrimination and intelligence they have understood their true position and interest in the great conflict, notwithstanding the arts and influence of their masters; with what absolute unanimity and constancy they have acted upon their convictions everywhere, in public or in private, in the struggle of battle, or in ministering to our wandering captives; and, more than all, when we consider the extraordinary *moderation* they have displayed in the hour of victory and of deliverance, have we not reason to hesitate in our contemptuous judgments of them as a race? It was a grand triumph when they rose and cha-

lenged and received from all the world acknowledgment of their equal bravery in battle with their oppressors. But when we consider their oppression and degradation for two hundred years; their stripes, their indignities, their accumulated humiliations and wrongs, their treasured causes for revenge for generation upon generation, and then observe with what meekness and self control they accept their sudden deliverance, and when, among all these millions, who are said to be savages, now suddenly set free at a period of the greatest general disorder, not one single act of violence, of outrage, or of vengeance is recorded against them, are we not forced to review our conclusion as to their true character and claims? Is it not possible, after all, that they have an education that we have not fully understood, a discipline of labor, and sorrow—instructed also of a rude but tender religious sentiment, which has borne these fruits of meekness, humility and self-control? What people before, after generations of humiliation, have emerged from slavery to freedom with so fair a record?

Again, you speak earnestly of the power of prejudice, and urge us to beware how we encounter that power as it is arrayed against the colored men. It is indeed a great power—the great power which always stands in the way of all genuine progress. It is the principal element of danger in the power of caste, of privilege, of aristocracy all over the world. That power of prejudice is the great obstacle to the people's cause and of true republicanism always. And it is not a sham or a pretense, but is founded in actual, sincere, though mistaken opinions. The aristocracies of Europe were just as sincere in their opinion that the common people of this country could not build up and maintain a firm and lasting government here, as these Southern masters are that the colored race is incompetent to act for

themselves without guardians. Why, sir, the real heartfelt contempt of these masters for the negroes, is hardly greater than it was for President Lincoln when he went to Washington in 1861. He was, in their view, a mere laborer—a mere poor—with no good blood in his veins. My dear sir, no reasoning will do away this cruel and blind prejudice—nothing will do it away but experience. The only possible way to overcome it is to give the people a chance—give them all an equal start—and let them show how far they can rise upon merit.

Of course, I do not need to assure you that I am as anxious to see the amendment abolishing slavery throughout the land adopted by all the states, as you are; but how that measure is any more likely to prevail by excluding the votes of the colored men who are all in favor of it, than by admitting them, I am not able to

understand. Bear in mind that the Congress or the government is the sole judge of the conditions and terms upon which those rebellious states can resume their privileges as states, and therefore that it is certainly in the discretion of Congress to say who shall vote upon this and kindred questions. Will they say that all the enemies of the government and the Union shall vote and decide these vital matters, and that this immense class of sincere and earnest friends of both shall have no voice?

My dear sir, I address you as a christian philosopher and statesman—it were idle to address you in behalf of these poor and lowly if you were not such—and I call upon you to review your position and to consider these things—consider, above all, *how wise it always is to be just.*

Yours very truly,  
O. H. WALDO.

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#### No. 4. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE REBEL DEBT, OR OF THE LOSSES OF REBELS BY THE WAR, SHOULD BE GUARDED AGAINST BY CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION.

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 10, 1865.

*Hon. J. R. Doolittle:*

DEAR SIR:—The final and complete overthrow of the great rebellion, attended by the destruction of slavery, must stand as a most important era in the history of this country. We now step upon the threshold of a new period; and whether that period is to witness here a growth in greatness and power hitherto unexampled, or the beginning of the decline of the

Republic, may depend more than any man can now foretell, upon the action of men in power at this critical juncture, in guarding against dangers already clearly visible. Of course, in the limits of a letter, I can only glance at the topics which are treated. There is one other subject to which I desire to call your attention. It may be that it assumes too much importance in my mind, but it seems to me that it is of the utmost consequence, that every

possible safeguard should be adopted to preserve the sanctity of the National debt and of the National credit; and, to that end, to prevent the assumption in any form or upon any pretext, either by the United States or by any state or states, of the rebel debt or of the losses of rebels by reason of the war. Right at this point I think I see one of the greatest dangers which attend our present position. If the states lately in rebellion are at once admitted to a full share in the National government, and consequently to a full representation in both houses of Congress, I think I foresee the most astounding scenes and schemes of fraud—a gigantic and fearful struggle with corruption—a struggle which shall as far exceed all others of a similar kind, which we have seen, as the great war we have just witnessed exceeds the whiskey rebellion.

The amount of our national debt may be from three to four thousand millions dollars—say \$4,000,000,000—when all is footed up—an immense debt, but a debt that we can pay, and which we will cheerfully pay, when, we remember the priceless benefits for the purchase of which that debt was incurred. The true amount of the rebel debt we do not know; but when we remember that borrowing was literally their *only* resource, confederate notes their only currency, and that that currency was depreciated almost to a nominal value, we may easily believe that the amount of that debt is even vastly greater than that of our own. And if we add to that, the loss of all kinds by rebels in the war—including the loss of property in slaves, which was, at least, two thousand millions of dollars—we must certainly reach a sum double the amount of our debt as stated above—for all accounts agree that the desolation is universal all over that country. If only half those debts and losses were assumed,

it would double our national debt, which is already so fearfully large. The great bulk of that debt is held by the white men of the Southern States—only a drop in the bucket—say fifteen millions—being held by their English friends. Those entire States were, for four years, tasked to supply the wants of the rebel government and army, and the products of three years, in fact a great part of the wealth of that country is represented in confederate paper to the amount of these thousands of millions. The whole people are the holders of this paper—the fruit of crime—and the sufferers by the losses of the war; for the whole land is bare, and the whole people impoverished.

Now sir, if the white men of those states are permitted to send full delegations to Congress, with no conditions except those thus far insisted on, do you believe there is a doubt that those delegations will stand as a unit in Congress, in favor of granting relief to their constituents from these great burdens. You certainly cannot have such a doubt. They evidently expect or hope for such relief.—The very form of their action in convention implies such hope and gives us warning. A voice from over the sea—a voice of the mourners over the sea—is already heard, and will be heard in more important tones, urging this measure of relief, and insisting in the most strenuous terms that states never die—that forms of government may change—that dynasties may pass away and new ones appear—but that the states remain immortal and indestructible; that, whatever their changing forms of government may be, their obligations and engagements remain; that the rebel organization was the real and the only government *de facto* in those Southern States at the time when these debts were contracted; that, upon the breaking up of the rebel organizations

or government *de facto*, the federal government is the successor to that so broken up: and so that those debts ought no more to be repudiated by the true or restored government, than the debt of France, contracted under Louis Phillipe, should be repudiated by Napoleon III. And when that day shall come, when those representatives stand together demanding this measure of relief in Congress—although they may not, within themselves, possess a majority,—what difficulty, think you, they would have in getting allies enough from a class of men who have all along denounced the war as a crime against the South, and sought to depreciate the National credit in order to render the successful prosecution of that war impossible, in consideration of political aid, to enable them to carry their point. Consider the immense treasure that will be at stake when the question is upon the issue of three, four or five thousand millions of dollars of United States securities, and, if there should be a lack of one vote or twenty votes, consider what per centage of the immense sum involved, would be required to conciliate a further number of men of the kind which refused at the outbreak of the rebellion to vote a dollar or a man in support of the war. I certainly do not doubt that a very earnest and very dangerous attempt will be made to carry such a scheme of dividing and distributing the burden of their losses, or—failing in that—to repudiate the National debt.—Your position and ability render your opinions very important: and in view of the danger in this direction, which I believe to be great, I am anxious to urge upon your attention the question whether we have security enough against this danger in a mere resolution of Congress during the war, with only Northern men present—which, of course, is a mere formal expression of opinion of those

then there. The financial resources of a nation are its sinews of war. The National credit is the very source and spring of those indispensable resources. Corrupt or dry up that fountain, and you destroy the vigor and ability of a people to go through any great trial. Let it once be seen that we have not steadfastness and integrity to meet our obligations fairly contracted—or that our government is so constituted that fraud and corruption can prevail to add to and swell the amount of the National burdens without limit, by assuming the debts incurred by traitors and rebels in attempts to break down the Nation itself, and all confidence in the stability or solvency of the Government must cease among men: and, when that ceases, the power of the giant is gone, and this people can never again perform the labors of the last four years.

What, then, is our remedy? Would it not be a safeguard entirely within our reach and most reasonable under the circumstances, to require, as a condition to the return of representatives from communities lately in rebellion to Congress, an amendment to the Federal constitution, prohibiting forever the assumption in any form, by the Federal government or by any state government, of the rebel debt or of the losses sustained by rebels by reason of the war? Certainly no argument or appeal can be needed to show the injustice of adding this burden to the immense sacrifices of the loyal men of the North in putting down the rebellion.—And yet we are already warned that the attempt will be made.

But it would be equally unjust to permit the true and loyal men of the South, white and black, who have not shared in the crimes of the rebellion, who did what they could to avert that evil, to be now forced under the political control of those who committed that crime, and, in committing it, created this spurious debt

and now hold it; and then, to be subjected, by that hated political power, to the burden of the fearful losses which follow that crime. There is and will be henceforth a numerous and powerful body of sincere and patriotic Union men in the South. What injustice could exceed that by which we should first take all political power from those who are our friends and bestow it upon their enemies and our enemies, and then provide no safeguard against these common enemies imposing upon them the whole burden of the losses of the rebellion and war?

It must be borne in mind that what the Federal government is to do, to guard against this wrong, must be done now—before reconstruction is accomplished—for when those states are fully clothed again with all their former power and privileges as states, the subject will be entirely within their control and out of the reach of President and Congress. Then those restored states will manage their own affairs in their own way. And what shall hinder them, through their conventions and legislatures, from so modifying and framing their state constitutions and statutes as to assume, as state obligations, all, or so much as they please, of this rebel burden of debt and loss, and then to impose the taxes to pay the interest and principal of that debt on such classes of property and such classes of persons as they elect? All this can certainly be done by them without the consent either of the Federal government or of the mass of non-voting people upon whom the whole burden may be cast. Thus that whole class may be made perpetually tributary, with all their industry and resources, to the ruling class, and a new form of servitude will be inaugurated.

I do not wish to be the getter up of new questions and fanciful dangers; but

we are already apprized that the effort to assume those rebel burdens—one way or the other—will be strenuously made. I have more fear of its being assumed to some extent by action of Congress than otherwise. At this period, we have seen, we have the right to require conditions of returning rebel states—and since this rebel debt and loss is the immediate fruit and result of the rebellion—as it were a part of the rebellion itself—and should certainly be rooted up and destroyed, what more suitable or reasonable condition of the return of those rebel communities to the full exercise of political power, as states in the Union, than that they assent to the strict and perpetual prohibition of the assumption or recognition either by the states or the United States, of any portion of the rebel debt or of the burdens and losses of rebels by the war, by amendment of the Federal Constitution, so that the courts of the United States shall have power and jurisdiction to enforce that prohibition? But we must act now if ever. Now we are fixing conditions. Now we may and should set a guard at every avenue of danger. The perpetuity of the government itself may and probably will depend upon the wisdom of our action now in fixing the conditions of restoration. When the work of reconstruction or restoration shall have been accomplished, the opportunity will be gone.

I have addressed you at far greater length than I intended, and yet have only touched upon the topics treated. If I have trespassed too far upon your attention, it is because I have not time to study to be more brief—and because I am an American citizen and am filled with the common solicitude for the stability of Republican government in this country.

Yours very truly,  
O. H. WALDO.